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Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq [li-Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī] (Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination [By Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī]) by Shams al-Din Shahrāzuri; Hossein Ziai; Shihab al-Din Suhrawardī

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personages—serving to supplement the entries in the new edition of the *Encyclopedia of Islam* and the *Encyclopedia Iranica* on related subjects. He assists the student of Sufism in comprehending the sources of the opposition to, and the diatribes against, institutional Sufism that appear in most of the classical Sufi poets. Rumi and Hafiz, for instance, often tend to endorse the *qalandars*' critique of *khānaqāh*-based Sufism, while Karamustafa's illuminating exposition of the literary topos of Qalandariyya reveals the historical and literary basis of their critique.

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Sharḥ Ḥikmat al-Ishrāq [li-Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī] (Commentary on the Philosophy of Illumination [by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī]), Shams al-Dīn Shahrazuri, edited, with introduction and notes, by Hossein Ziai, Tehran: Institute for Cultural Studies and Research, 1993, xxiii pp., English + 646 pp. Arabic + 84 pp. Persian.

The major question raised in Suhrawardī's text, the *Philosophy of Illumination*, and explicated in Shahrazuri's commentary on it is how prophets, lawgivers, and lesser "divines" communicate with the divinity and ultimately reach complete union with it. An answer is sought not to facilitate grasping the merit of their legislation and fathoming why it guides us as it does, although an understanding of both does thereby result, but to enable us to perceive the true things, the different ranks of being, the divinely inspired souls or lights, and eventually the light of lights. Consequently, no attention is paid to those who would urge that prophets and lawgivers merely pretend to have recourse to the divinity so as to gain more ready acceptance of themselves and their recommendations by the people for whom they bring a religion or a legislation. Yet readers of the text and the commentary will divide according to the way they view this activity and those who engage in it. For this reason, these two texts present a powerful challenge to the history of philosophy and to the traditional manner in which it has been interpreted.

Hossein Ziai's long involvement with both texts and the related literature, one spanning almost two decades, has enabled him to establish a most trustworthy critical edition. The commentary is very clearly organized, with each major division of Suhrawardī's text being numbered to facilitate reference. (The text is an integral part of Shahrazuri's commentary and is set forth fully in it.) Notes to indicate alternative readings as well as to identify works and passages cited are abundant without being obtrusive. Moreover, the introductory material is helpful, yet not overwhelming, and the same can be said of the general index at the end of the commentary even though a computer error skewed some references. Equally valuable are the detailed table of contents and the corresponding arrangement of the text. Ziai's editorial work deserves high praise from students of Islamic philosophy and mysticism, for it permits more ready access to the unfamiliar world of illuminationist philosophy or, more properly, illuminationist wisdom (the term being *ḥikmat al-ishrāq* and not *falsafat al-ishrāq*, even though

both Suhrawardi and Shahrazuri do seem to use the terms interchangeably).

In the most important respect, however, few will ever have more than a vague notion of what illuminationist wisdom encompasses, at least as it is set forth here. Both Suhrawardi and his commentator insist in their introductions (a general introduction by Shahrazuri, another by Suhrawardi, and then an introductory commentary on that one by Shahrazuri) that this book is closed to anyone who is not already a divine or does not seek to become one. It is a work for the mystic, for the one who has already developed a "taste" (the term is *dhawq* and might be more loosely understood as intuition) for the divine and wishes to draw closer to it. Indeed, the least qualified reader is, literally, one who has already experienced something like a twinkling or a glimpse of the divine. Yet this exclusion is more adamantly stated by the commentator than by Suhrawardi, who even strives to make a place for Aristotle and his peripatetic followers. He is intent, above all, on showing how peripatetic learning differs from, and must ultimately be brought into line with, illuminationist wisdom and method, whereas Shahrazuri makes the gap between the two appear impossible to close.

Shahrazuri's stance is at odds with the general account of philosophy that both he and Suhrawardi set forth. According to this account, illuminationist wisdom is nothing new. To the contrary, it originated long before present times and can be traced back to Empedocles, Pythagoras, Anaxagoras, Democritus, and even to Socrates and Plato. Since, according to this view, the process consists merely of a teacher passing wisdom on to his student over time, Plato must evidently have passed such wisdom on to his student, Aristotle, just as he received it from his own teacher, Socrates. The breach occurs insofar as Aristotle and his followers relied more on syllogism and investigation than on seeking the wisdom coming from the intellectual lights, that is, the souls that have attained illumination. After Aristotle, illuminationist wisdom waned and slowly died out. Only in Persia did the old tradition continue to be preserved, and Suhrawardi has the merit of having discovered how certain Persian and other Eastern sages protected that teaching over the ages. Even such a statement must be modified, for blame devolves less on Aristotle than his followers—less on Aristotle, eventually, than Avicenna—for the excesses of peripatetic method and the turn from concern with "taste" or intuition.

At issue, then, is how to learn more about the spiritual world and the intellectual lights present there. The goal is to increase in being divine so as to become like the great spiritual leaders, the prophets, and even the messengers. Such persons are noteworthy not for their message nor even for the legislation they bring, but for their rank with respect to divinity. Indeed, no attention is paid here to what prophets, messengers, or lawgivers say and do except insofar as that sheds light on the higher world of the lights. Thus it is all the more frustrating that neither in the introductions nor in the fuller text are anything more than hints and suggestions about such matters to be found.

The text itself is divided into two major sections, with the first (divided in turn into three treatises) devoted to an investigation of logic and of the errors occurring in the sciences—the natural as well as the divine. This first section is, then, quite faithful to the general Aristotelian explanation of the divisions of learning. In the second section, which is divided into five treatises, attention is paid to the divine lights and the light of lights, as well as to the principles of existence and their ranking. The complexity of the structure of each treatise

within each section and especially within the first section is also noteworthy. For example, the first treatise is divided into seven numbered precepts (*dawābiṭ*, sing. *dābiṭ*), a chapter (*faṣṭ*), and an illuminationist maxim (*qāʿida ishrāqiyya*). Yet other kinds of subdivisions are used in the other treatises, each serving to highlight a different aspect of the exposition.

The exposition in the first section is quite straightforward; it explains logic and the other sciences in a fairly conventional empirical, that is, Aristotelian, manner. Still, there is a constant attempt to extend the conventional explanation so as to encompass light-bearing substances (*jawāhir nūriyya*) and similar phenomena not such as to be apprehended by the senses. The account of the divine lights and everything related to that spiritual world as set forth in the second section is all too elusive, purposely so it would seem. Indeed, as was observed in the introduction, nothing more than hints and suggestions are offered here.

In sum, in spite of Hossein Ziai's abundant painstaking efforts to prepare such an accurate, well-annotated, and most accessible text, its teaching remains elusive. That said, perhaps it will not be amiss to point to two apparent flaws in what appear to be the basic premises of illuminationist wisdom, at least as set forth here. First, the knowledge that either Suhrawardi or his commentator has of Greek philosophy is, by the admission of each, spotty and incomplete. They acknowledge that few of Plato's texts have come down to them and that they know of the writings of the pre-Socratics only by hearsay. Could it be, then, that they are simply not aware of Socrates' own account of his great turn, his second sailing, as alluded to in the *Phaedo* and in the *Apology*—namely, his decision to turn away from Anaxagoras and the inquiry into nature in order to concentrate upon human matters? Might they, by the same token, be unaware of Socratic irony and thus take far too seriously Socratic statements about divine things, statements that point as readily to cosmic ignorance as to wisdom? Similarly, have they simply overlooked the fact that Plato never speaks in his own name and that Platonic spokesmen contradict one another? Stated most baldly, have they perhaps failed to appreciate that what Socrates and other Platonic spokesmen speak of as divine matters are nothing of the sort?

Second, intent as Suhrawardi and his commentator are on pointing to the errors of Avicenna and thus to those of the peripatetic school, they overlook Alfarabi and his explanation of prophets, lawgivers, religion, and revelation. They do so at peril to their argument, for their claim that *sharīʿa* is as specific to a people and language as grammar or poetry undermines their frequent recourse to its manifestation—the Quran—to buttress the universal claims they make about illuminationist wisdom.

However these questions are to be explained, there is no doubt that Hossein Ziai has put all scholars of medieval Islamic philosophy and mysticism in his debt by his fine edition of these two seminal texts.

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